2: Bowers E-5 (1930-1931)1950 NQ17 Mandan NQ17



since some accounts tell of being created at the Heart River while others tell of a migration along the Missouri from the southeast. This same inconsistency was recognized by Maximilian.[2] My informants did not consider this to be an inconsistency at all. Their explanation was that, when Lone Man made the land around the Heart River, he also made the land to the south as far as the ocean. He made fish people, eagle people, bear people, corn people, buffalo people, and others whose history was inaugurated into myths of the sacred bundles. These various people were born into the Mandan tribe by magical means, thus populating the lands.

The large number of village sites belonging to a single archeological focus adjacent to the Missouri River both below and above the junction with the Heart River indicates that the tribe at one time numbered several thousand, possibly as much as seven or eight thousand, while the depth of refuse establishes continuous residence there of several centuries.

## THE MANDAN HOUSEHOLD

The household was the smallest economic unit and was composed of one or more biological families related through the females. Theoretically, the household was held together by females so long as their lineage was unbroken and the lodge belonged to the clan of which the females were members. When a village was first built on a new site, each household selected a site for its lodge, corn scaffolds, and caches. There was a tendency for related families to select adjacent quarters, while those intimately connected with the Okipa ceremony selected lodge sites adjacent to the open circle. These lodge sites within the village were held permanently within the female line, and, when returning to rebuild after a temporary abandonment of the village, female descendants of the original builders were entitled to their former sites. When a family died out, the lodge belonged to the clan of the females and could be occupied by another group of the same clan or could be sold to females of a different clan. My informants emphatically denied that abandoned lodges could be occupied until they had received permission

2. *Ibid.*, XXIII, 307–8. There is some inconsistency present, since other myths imply that the Mandan have been on or near the Heart River since the creation of man by Lone Man.

3:Will and Spinden E-5 (1905) 1906
NQ17 Mandan NQ17



In the center of the village was a large open space of about four acres[1] and in the center of this was the "Ark of the First Man." This was in the shape of a hogshead, of planks and hoops.[2] It was open above, the planks were embedded in the ground, and the hoops were branches tied around to hold these together. The Mandans called this the Big Canoe[3] and in it were some of their greatest medicines. This open space was the seat of all their festivals, dances and ceremonies, and here also they played their games of Chungkee or Skohpe. The space was closely surrounded by houses placed at equal distances apart and all facing the center. The largest of these lodges on the south side of the area was the medicine lodge, and on a pole above this was a figure of skin, with a carved wooden head, which represented the Evil Spirit.

About one quarter of a mile or less to the south of the village was a race-course; a hundred or more scaffolds on which the dead were deposited; slides for their games were also made outside the palisades. The ground about the houses was honeycombed with pits and caches in which most of the food and many of the valuables of the inhabitants were stored. The house roofs formed a general repository where bull boats, buffalo skulls, pottery, sledges and people were scattered promiscuously over the rounded surface, around the edge of which Bradbury says they built a sort of low railing.

HOUSES:—The houses themselves were many times described, sometimes with considerable variation, and it is highly probable that there was more or less variation of construction in the minor details. They were distinguished from those of the Arikara in that the ground was first excavated, and that they were rather hemispherical, whereas the houses of the latter were more conical, like those of the Pawnee. Catlin[4] places the average size of the houses at from forty to sixty feet in diameter, depending on the size and importance of the family, and Henry[5] tells us that the one in which he himself stayed was ninety feet in diameter.

[1] Henry: vol. I, p. 338. "Sixty feet across," Maximilian: p. 386; "One hundred and fifty feet," Catlin: vol. I, p. 88.
[2] Catlin gives this as eight to ten feet high, Maximilian as four or five.
[3] Catlin: vol. I, p. 66.
[4] Op. cit., vol. I, p. 81.
[5] Op. cit., vol. I, p. 338.

7: Catlin R, E-5 (1832-1840) 1857
NQ17 Mandan NQ17



461 the east or the west, the scenes of their battles, which they are recounting over to each other. In another direction, the wooing lover, softening the heart of his fair Taih-nah-tai-a with the notes of his simple lute. On other lodges, and beyond these, groups are engaged in games of the "moccasin," or the "platter." Some are to be seen manufacturing robes and dresses, and others, fatigued with amusements or occupations, have stretched their limbs to enjoy the luxury of sleep, whilst basking in the sun. With all this wild and varied medley of living beings are mixed their dogs, which seem to be so near an Indian's heart, as almost to constitute a material link of his existence.

361 778 In the centre of the village is an open space, or public area, of 150 feet in diameter, and circular in form, which is used for all public games and festivals, shews and exhibitions; and also for their "annual religious ceremonies," which are soon to take place, and of which I shall hereafter give some account. The lodges around this open space front in, with their doors towards the centre; and in the middle of this circle stands an object of great religious veneration, as I am told, on account of the importance it has in the conduction of those annual religious rites.

778 This object is in form of a large hogshead, some eight or ten feet high, made of planks and hoops, containing within it some of their choicest medicines or mysteries, and religiously preserved unhacked or scratched, as a symbol of the "Big Canoe," as they call it.

One of the lodges fronting on this circular area, and facing this strange object of their superstition, is called the "Medicine Lodge," or council house. It is in this sacred building that these wonderful ceremonies, in commemoration of the flood, take place. I am told by the Traders that the cruelties of these scenes are frightful and abhorrent in the extreme; and that this huge wigwam, which is now closed, has been built exclusively for this grand celebration. I am every day reminded of the near approach of the season for this strange affair, and as I have not yet seen any thing of it, I cannot describe it; I know it only from the relations of the Traders who have witnessed parts of it; and their descriptions are of so extraordinary a character, that I would not be willing to describe until I can see for myself, —which will, in all probability, be in a few days.

351 778 In ranging the eye over the village from where I am writing, there is presented to the view the strangest mixture and medley of unintelligible trash (independant of the living beings that are in motion), that can possibly be imagined. On the roofs of the lodges, besides the groups of living, are buffaloes' skulls, skin canoes, pots and pottery; sleds and sledges—and suspended on poles, erected some twenty feet above the doors of their wigwams, are displayed in a pleasant day, the scalps of warriors, preserved as trophies; and thus proudly exposed as evidence of their warlike deeds. In other parts are raised on poles the warriors' pure and whitened shields and quivers, with medicine-bags attached; and here and there a sacrifice of red

7: Catlin R, E-5 (1832-1840) 1857
NQ17 Mandan NQ17



cloth, or other costly stuff, offered up to the Great Spirit, over the door of some benignant chief, in humble gratitude for the blessings which he is enjoying. Such is a part of the strange medley that is before and around me; and amidst them and the blue streams of smoke that are rising from the tops of these hundred "coal-pits," can be seen in distance, the green and boundless, treeless, bushless prairie; and on it, and contiguous to the piquet which encloses the village, a hundred scaffolds, on which their "dead live," as they term it.

These people never bury the dead, but place the bodies on slight scaffolds just above the reach of human hands, and out of the way of wolves and dogs; and they are there left to moulder and decay. This cemetery, or place of deposite for the dead, is just back of the village, on a level prairie (PLATE 48); and with all its appearances, history, forms, ceremonies, &c. is one of the strangest and most interesting objects to be described in the vicinity of this peculiar race.

Whenever a person dies in the Mandan village, and the customary honours and condolence are paid to his remains, and the body dressed in its best attire, painted, oiled, feasted, and supplied with bow and quiver, shield, pipe and tobacco—knife, flint and steel, and provisions enough to last him a few days on the journey which he is to perform; a fresh buffalo's skin, just taken from the animal's back, is wrapped around the body, and tightly bound and wound with thongs of raw hide from head to foot. Then other robes are soaked in water, till they are quite soft and elastic, which are also bandaged around the body in the same manner, and tied fast with thongs, which are wound with great care and exactness, so as to exclude the action of the air from all parts of the body.

There is then a separate scaffold erected for it, constructed of four upright posts, a little higher than human hands can reach; and on the tops of these are small poles passing around from one post to the others; across which a number of willow-rods just strong enough to support the body, which is laid upon them on its back, with its feet carefully presented towards the rising sun.

There are a great number of these bodies resting exactly in a similar way; excepting in some instances where a chief, or medicine-man, may be seen with a few yards of scarlet or blue cloth spread over his remains, as a mark of public respect and esteem. Some hundreds of these bodies may be seen reposing in this manner in this curious place, which the Indians call, "the village of the dead;" and the traveller, who visits this country to study and learn, will not only be struck with the novel appearance of the scene; but if he will give attention to the respect and devotions that are paid to this sacred place, he will draw many a moral deduction that will last him through life: he will learn, at least, that filial, conjugal, and paternal affection are not necessarily the results of civilization; but that the Great Spirit has given them to man in his native state; and that the